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SUBJECT: LEADER OF A FAILED STATE: HOW BOZIZE MAINTAINS POWER

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Francois Bozize took power in the Central African Republic on March 15, 2003 overthrowing Felix-Ange Patasse. It was his second attempt at that coup, but may have been only the last in a long series of extra-legal attempts to gain power. This message describes how Bozize, often the man in the background, has none the less consolidated and maintained his hold on power. END SUMMARY

The Man and the Military

12. (SBU) Bozize is always referred to in formal introductions as General of the armies as well as head of state. This is not a mere formality; his father was a military officer and he has been a military man for almost all of his adult life. Moreover, he appears to see the military as both a guarantor of his power and a threat. He had been appointed to ever higher military posts in every Central African government, starting with that of Bokassa and continuing through that of Patasse. (It is rumored that his favor with Bokassa was enhanced by his physical attack on a French non-commissioned officer who his alleged to have insulted Bokassa.) He has been, at various times, for various governments, Minister of Defense, Minister of Information, and Chief of Staff of the Army. It was during his tenure as Minister of Information for President Kolingba that he was accused of coup plotting, arrested, returned to Bangui and, according to reports (BBC and others), physically tortured. There are also numerous reports of his being the enforcer for various presidents and taking the lead in the violent suppression of various coup attempts and mutinies. The key point being that Bozize does not appear to be any stranger to violence, both political and personal. He is also no stranger to palace conspiracies and the danger of the military turning on

the president as has happened so many times in the CAR's past. His presidential guard has included Chadian and, more recently, South African elements as well as Central Africans such as the notorious Eugene Ngaikosse, responsible for reprisals against civilian populations for attacks on the regime by rebel forces. Bozize has, until recently, maintained for himself the title of Minister of Defense, though he has now appointed his son Francis as Deputy Defense Minister.

The Man and the Government

¶3. (SBU) While Bozize is clearly a military man, he has long harbored political ambition, dating from at least 1993 when he lost the presidential elections to Patasse. Now in power at last, he is not an impressive president. Most elements of the government are barely functioning, staffed by often unpaid civil servants with no resources, while Bozize fills key ministries with members of his family and clan. Foremost among these is Minister of Mines Sylvain Ndoutingai, a former Colonel in the armed forces, who is usually described as Bozize's nephew. With access to the nation's diamond resources, Ndoutingai is the Bozize clan's money man, often working with individuals such as Saifee Durbar, an Anglo-Pakistani businessman wanted for fraud in France and recently given the position of Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs in a brazenly transparent attempt to establish immunity from prosecution for Durbar.

The Opposition(s)

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¶4. (SBU) Sadly, perhaps, the Opposition is unimpressive; the best lack all conviction, while the worst are simply full of passionate intensity against Bozize, the man - none is evidently more competent or less corrupt. Former Patasse Prime Minister Martin Ziguele, head of the MLPC is an urbane, sophisticated man who ran strongly against Bozize in 2005, but the Inclusive Political Dialogue of 2008 seems to have sidelined him and he has told us that he is content to make his living doing consulting work in Paris and that he no longer seeks any government position. The rest of the unarmed opposition to Bozize is arrogant, disorganized and lacking in any coherent program beyond the questioning of Bozize's legitimacy. Much of their disdain for Bozize results from his membership of the Gbaya ethnic group, described by some Central Africans (including one Minister in the government) as 'the stupidest tribe in the nation.' Bozize's time spent driving a bush taxi is much mocked by better educated opposition figures, some of whom, in their impassioned rhetoric, border on advocacy for violent overthrow. Yet in July and August of 2009, when Bangui was deprived of electricity and water following failure of power turbines at the Boali dam, the opposition was unable to organize planned demonstrations to protest the government's incompetent handling of the crisis. The members of the former armed opposition have yet to step forward and take any political action. Interestingly, but again, not surprisingly, the unarmed opposition say that they have not yet made any effort to reach out to the former armed opposition to form common fronts, or plan joint actions. The CAR's population was deeply traumatized by the looting, rape, and killing by forces loyal to former DRC rebel turned DRC Vice-President turned ICC defendant, Jean-Pierre Bemba, that came to Patasse's aid. Bozize's coup was eagerly accepted by Bangui and he may be still be seen as the best alternative, being 'the devil you know.'

The neighbors

¶5. (SBU) Chadian President Deby assisted Bozize in his seizure of power. Although Deby is preoccupied elsewhere, Bozize probably counts on Deby to protect his northern flank. To the

south, former DRC Vice-President Jean-Pierre Bemba, currently on trial by the ICC, no longer holds sway in Equateur, neutralizing any threat from across the Oubangui River. The north east of CAR, bordering with Chad and Sudan is so remote from Bangui as to be of little concern to Bozize. Accordingly, he has been content to let French troops, now wearing EUFOR badges, maintain a presence in Birao until such time as a UN force is deployed as part of MINURCAT. Similarly, while the arrival of the Lord's Resistance Army in south-eastern CAR in February of 2008 attracted international attention, it was virtually ignored by the CARG; Obo is closer, and has better road links, to Kampala than Bangui. Relations with Cameroon appear to be almost moribund. Bozize has not met Biya in years and the Cameroonian Embassy in Bangui was led by a Charge for over a year until the recent appointment of a new Ambassador; this despite the CAR's almost total dependence on Douala as its only real port. Congolese President Sassou is a friend of Bozize's: he was the only foreign leader to attend CAR Independence Day celebrations in 2007. The friendship may be based in part on forestry concessions made by Bozize's government to companies controlled by members of Sassou's family as well as on common membership of the same Masonic lodge. At the same time, the CAR forest

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industry complains that the poor state of the Pointe Noire/Brazzaville railroad, coupled with 'processing' delays of up to six months, means that they cannot export logs down the Oubangui River and are forced to use the much more expensive overland route to Douala. They also note that the Cameroonians are subsidizing fuel costs for their timber industry to keep it competitive during the world market downturn. Bozize clearly has important work to do with his neighbors, but there is no sign that he is even aware of these issues. Which brings us to Gabonese President Bongo. Bozize was born in Gabon, a fact which may or may not have significance, and President Bongo speaks the Central African national language Sango fluently, according to some reports. What is undoubtedly significant is that Bongo agreed to act as godfather to the peace accords reached between the government and the rebels and to open and close the Inclusive political dialogue. According to at least one observer, Bongo provided the cash necessary to buy off the rebel leadership. COMMENT: Given the political, rather than tribal nature of the CAR's civil war, AmEmbassy Bangui is inclined to believe these reports. END COMMENT

Outside interests

16. (SBU) Although Bozize reportedly received a tongue-lashing from French President Sarkozy during their brief one-on-one meeting at the Elysee in November 2007, tensions appear to be somewhat eased with the settlement of a dispute between the government and French petroleum company TOTAL and the signing of a deal with AREVA for exploitation of CAR's uranium resources. The French Embassy in Bangui, previously tough with the CARG on governance issues, appears to have moderated its position with these developments and the arrival in August 2008 of a new Ambassador who appears more favorable to Bozize. The appointment of Saifee Durbar as deputy minister of foreign affairs may have ended that honeymoon. The French have demarched the Department in Washington about Durbar and the French ambassador (PROTECT) has had several very quiet conversations with the Ambassador in Bangui. These conversations express his deep frustration with the actions of the Bozize government and his search for ways to make it clear that the Durbar appointment is an unacceptable insult and that the Bozize government will have to suffer a penalty. While AmEmbassy Bangui had previously thought that the French Embassy in Bangui was ahead of the Quai, it now appears that they may have Paris on board and that we may expect some action by the French. Although China was unwilling to finance the repair of the Boali turbines, Bozize knows that he can count on the Chinese, and the Russians (who have no visible interests in CAR), for at least tacit support. The Chinese have built a large stadium and continue to build schools and similar projects

while running an aggressive public diplomacy program with outreach directly into the poorer neighborhoods of Bangui. The Chinese are also reported to have bought 49 per cent of the French uranium concession at Bakouma. Libya's presence is much diminished since the beginning of the decade, but Bozize has no issues with Gadhafi in particular or with the African Union in general. Bozize does, however, appear to be concerned about the possibility of an ICC investigation into the activities of his forces when he took power, writing a formal letter to UNSYG Ban to suspend the prosecution of Bemba.

The population

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17. (SBU) There is a streak of fatalism and resignation among the population. Most Central Africans are poor, many are traumatized by the events of their history and all appear to be tired of the struggle for power among Bokassa's heirs. Bozize, who is an uncharismatic leader, even when he is somewhat more animatedly addressing crowds in Sango, is thus able to portray himself as a force for stability. He also makes just enough movement in his accommodations with the opposition and in his cabinet appointments (most of which, including that of Prime Minister, come with no real authority) to hold out to optimists the hope for a better future. Pessimists believe that Bozize will allow a certain amount of democracy as long as it will not lead to his being voted out of power.

18. (SBU) The conventional wisdom in Bangui today is that the opposition is incapable of mounting any real action against that Bozize government and the general population is too resigned to take action. The Ambassador was thus very attentive when the French let him know, very privately, that they are dusting off their Emergency and Evacuation plans and are concerned by what they see. At least some in the French embassy believe that popular patience does have limits and they note that confrontations in Bangui have always been violent. There is no way of knowing if the French have information that causes them to be worried or if this is merely a result of the arrival of a new Defense Attache, a special forces officer with a previous tour in Bangui during one of the spasms of fighting. In any case, we continue to work on our emergency preparedness.

The Future

19. (SBU) What does this mean for U.S. policy and activity in the CAR? A full discussion can be found in our Mission Strategic Plan, but in simplest terms: The peace accords provide an opening in 2009, but the history of problems in CAR is long and the challenges of engaging with this government start at the very top. We must thus keep our expectations low. We must do all we can to protect the fragile peace and prevent the failure of the upcoming elections. Any other programs that we may attempt will be rendered irrelevant if the CAR slides back into civil war.

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